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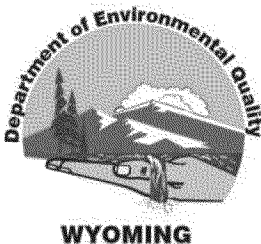
5:43 PM WED FEBRUARY 5, 2014

DEQ Seeks To Lower Environmental Standards For Many Streams

By **WILLOW BELDEN** (/PEOPLE/WILLOW-BELDEN)

About three-quarters of the streams in Wyoming could soon be subject to less stringent environmental standards.

The streams are currently classified as “primary contact” water bodies, meaning that people swim or otherwise recreate in them. Now, the Department of Environmental Quality is proposing to designate them as “secondary contact” streams, meaning human contact is less likely. The change would lower the standards for how much pollution can be discharged into the waterways.



(http://mediad.publicbroadcasting.net/p/wpr/files/201301/DEQ_Logo.jpg)

The DEQ's Lindsay Patterson says the original classification didn't make sense, because many of the streams have almost no water in them.

“What we're really talking about is dry draws in the state,” Patterson said. “We're talking about ephemeral water bodies, intermittent water bodies that have no water.”

So she says it makes sense to relax the environmental rules for those water bodies.

“It's kind of synonymous with having different speed limits for different roads in the state,” she said. “I think people recognize that a speed limit of 20 miles an hour is appropriate for urban areas, and areas near schools. But it's not necessary to impose a speed limit of 20 miles an hour on an interstate, even though we know that would be protective of people.”

Similarly, Patterson says, imposing the highest environmental standards on water that people don't touch is unnecessary regulation.

The DEQ is taking public comments until March 14. After that, they'll submit their proposal to the Environmental Protection Agency for approval.

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Hydro Logic · 8 months ago

DEQ's reasoning seems to fall short. "We" can now degrade ephemeral drainages more than permanent ones? Wyoming provides headwater areas for a number of major waterways. What if pollutants are allowed to accumulate in these areas for a decade and then we get a series of wet years which would then flush the ephemeral drainages into the permanent ones? All of these waterways, and their tributaries, should have equal and full protection under the law.


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Brian Stanford · 8 months ago

Wouldn't ephemeral or intermittent waterways be much more susceptible to degradation? Does the notion that humans would have less contact mean that other species would also have less contact. Intermittent riparian zones are far more fragile than those with consistent water flows. I'm not buying DEQs explanation on this one.

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